

Victoria's Old Growth Forests

What is Old Growth forest?

Many people assume that trees which are big and look old are considered to be 'old growth' forest.

However, in Victoria old growth forests are defined as forests in their oldest growth stage which show no obvious signs of disturbance from events such as wildfire¹.

How much Old Growth forest is in Victoria?

We often hear the phrase 'the last remaining stands of old growth forest'. However, there are more than 670 000 hectares of old growth forest in Victoria².

The majority of Victoria's old growth forest is protected in the permanent reserve system.

This protected area incorporates around 460 000 hectares³, or 68% of the total old growth forest across the State.

There are 4.8 million hectares⁴ of Victorian forest protected in conservation reserves. This forest will also, over time, also become old growth.

How much Old Growth forest is harvested in Victoria?

Small areas of Victoria's old growth forests are available for timber harvesting by VicForests.

VicForests harvests approximately 330 hectares of old growth each year, or 0.05% of Victoria's total old growth forest. The vast majority of this harvesting takes place in East Gippsland.

VicForests harvests no old growth Ash *Eucalypt* forest.

Why do we harvest some Old Growth forest?

Despite the small amount of old growth forest harvested each year, the wood sourced from these forests plays a vital role in Victoria's sustainable timber industry.

This timber is used in high-grade furniture and building products where strength and appearance are vital.

VicForests will eventually be able to move away from harvesting old growth forests altogether as more forest matures following bushfire or previous timber harvesting operations.

Characteristics of Old Growth and Regrowth Forests

Size is not always an accurate measure of tree age.

The tree on the left below is regrowth from bushfires in 1939, while the trees on the right are considered to be old growth. All trees were found on the same area in the Central Highlands and retained as habitat during harvesting operations.

The trees are of similar size dimensions but quite clearly have different characteristics.

The old growth trees on the right have broken crowns at their peak and have developed hollows which are used as shelter by native fauna, while the crown of the regrowth tree remains intact and it has not yet developed significant hollows.

A range of factors can influence tree size including location, rainfall and operations to 'thin' the surrounding forest. These factors can significantly improve growth rates but do not necessarily impact on the old growth characteristics of these trees.



Did you know?

Victoria's Old Growth forests:

There are more than 670 000 hectares⁵ of old growth forest in Victoria. The majority of this forest, 460 000 hectares⁶, is protected in conservation reserves.

Further areas of old growth outside of these reserves are protected by the comprehensive legislative framework which governs sustainable timber harvesting in Victoria.

VicForests:

VicForests harvests approximately 330 hectares of old growth forest each year.

This is a small percentage of the total amount of Old Growth forest in Victoria (0.05%) but remains a crucial part of Victoria's sustainable timber industry.

Almost all of this harvesting takes place in East Gippsland.

East Gippsland:

There are 224 000 hectares⁷ of old growth forest in the East Gippsland Forest Management Area alone.

More than 185 000 hectares (over 80%)⁸ of this old growth forest in East Gippsland is protected in conservation reserves. This forest is excluded from timber harvesting operations.



Central Highlands:

No old growth Ash forest is harvested in VicForests' Central Highlands region. No Ash Eucalypt older than 1900 is harvested in this region.

Exceptional growing conditions mean that large trees do exist in this part of the State. However, size does not always indicate whether a forest is old growth.

The majority of forest harvested in VicForests' Central Highlands region has regrown following bushfires in 1939.

Fire:

Fire remains the biggest threat to forests of all ages in Victoria including old growth.

VicForests, and its contractors, are actively involved in fire fighting initiatives.

This includes providing machinery, equipment and access to forests to reduce this threat.

Biodiversity:

A crucial part of sustainably managing Victoria's forests is to ensure there are trees from a range of age classes.

This range in tree age is essential to maintaining biodiversity in flora and fauna.

The younger trees in our forests provide food for animals while the older, hollow bearing trees provide shelter.

- 1 Victoria's State of the Forests Report 2008 (Department of Sustainability & Environment)
- 2 Australian State of the Forests Report 2010 (Department of Agriculture Fisheries & Forestry)
- 3 Australian State of the Forests Report 2010 (Department of Agriculture Fisheries & Forestry)
- 4 Victoria's State of the Forests Report 2008 (Department of Sustainability & Environment)
- 5 Australian State of the Forests Report 2010 (Department of Agriculture, Fisheries & Forestry)
- 6 Australian State of the Forests Report 2010 (Department of Agriculture, Fisheries & Forestry)
- 7 A Study of the Old-Growth Forests of East Gippsland - What is old-growth forest and how is it being managed in Victoria? (Department of Sustainability and Environment)
- 8 A Study of the Old-Growth Forests of East Gippsland - What is old-growth forest and how is it being managed in Victoria? (Department of Sustainability and Environment)

